

Camping

When visiting the area, consider camping at Natural Tunnel State Park, 18 miles south of Big Stone Gap, just off U.S. Route 23 near Duffield.

For more information, call or write:

Southwest Virginia Museum
Historical State Park
10 West First St. N
Big Stone Gap, Virginia 24219
(276) 523-1322



Department of Conservation & Recreation
CONSERVING VIRGINIA'S NATURAL & RECREATIONAL RESOURCES



Southwest Virginia Museum

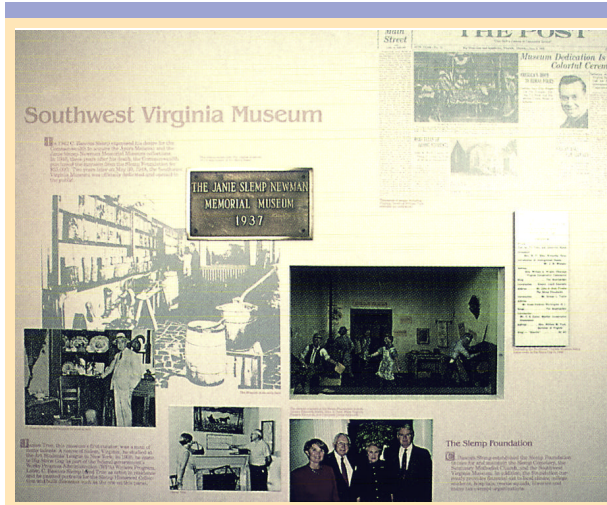
Historical State Park

A Story to Tell



Big Stone Gap, Virginia

Listed on the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places.



A Story to Tell . . .

Storytelling has been a popular way of sharing information, history and humor in this country for hundreds of years. That tradition remains strong in Southwest Virginia where there are so many stories to tell.

And now the Southwest Virginia Museum in Big Stone Gap plays a part in sharing those stories with the community and visitors alike.

Behind the Scenes

The Southwest Virginia Museum is housed in the mansion originally built in the 1880s by Rufus Ayers, a Virginia attorney general. The museum was acquired by the Commonwealth of Virginia in 1946 from the Slemple Foundation, established by C. Bascom Slemple, private secretary to President Calvin Coolidge and a member of Congress. The museum was officially dedicated by the state in 1948. Listed as a Virginia Landmark and National Historic Place, it is managed by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation.

In the late 1980s, the museum underwent extensive renovations, including the installation of new exhibits. Building upon its

extensive collection, the museum tells the story of the exploration and development of Southwest Virginia and the lives of the men and women who settled in and around the area.

Big Stone Gap Development

Big Stone Gap's "boom and bust" era is featured in the main gallery on the first floor of the museum. Having discovered the region's extensive coal and iron ore deposits in the late 1870s, northern businessmen dreamed of turning the tiny village of Big Stone Gap into the Pittsburgh of the South. Land speculators, the coming of the railroad and the development of the mining industry transformed Big Stone Gap into a vital cultural area boasting its own newspaper, police force, hotels, banks and schools.

Galleries on the second floor tell the story of Big Stone Gap and its residents at the turn of the century. Mail-order catalogs, photographs, radios and railroads were bringing the outside world into the everyday lives of Southwest Virginia residents.

Two of the second floor galleries chronicle the life and times of prominent local citizens and eight-term U.S. Congressman C. Bascom Slemple.





Slemp and his sister Janie's interest in telling the story of Southwest Virginia and its people served as the basis for establishing the Southwest Virginia Museum.



C. Bascom Slemp

Exploration and Discovery

The story of early exploration and settlement of the region is told in the third floor galleries. By the mid 1700s, settlers looking for a fresh start were traveling south out of Pennsylvania and Maryland into the valley of Virginia. In 1775 Daniel Boone pushed the Wilderness Road through Cumberland Gap, opening the way west. The flow of immigrants into and through Southwest Virginia increased dramatically.

Braving the unknown, pioneer settlers were almost totally dependent on the land, their own skills and the contents of the wagon for their every need. Display of tools, household furnishings, quilts and early commerce tell the story of these hardy pioneers.

Special Programming

The Southwest Virginia Museum is a wonderful place for school, church, civic, scout and tour groups to learn about the history of Big Stone Gap and those who settled in the area. Museum staff offers programs for all ages on a regular basis, providing special activities for children during the summer and students during the school year. Call the museum for more information.

A multi-purpose room in the basement of the museum is available for community use (reservations are required).

Support the Museum

Volunteers and supporters have contributed much to the museum over the years. C. Bascom Slemp established the Slemp Foundation to care for and help maintain the Seminary Church, the family cemetery and the Southwest Virginia Museum. An endowment made by the foundation will support educational projects at the museum for years to come. Volunteers are always needed to help identify old photographs, lead programs, assist with office duties, help maintain the collection and conduct living history interviews. If you would like to be a volunteer, call or stop by the museum.



Museum Shop

Take home something to commemorate your visit or find that special gift in the museum shop. All items are related to the museum or culture and history of the region. Jewelry, books about pioneer and Victorian eras, locally made crafts and reproductions of Victorian items are just some of what the shop has to offer.

Location

The Southwest Virginia Museum is in Big Stone Gap at the corner of West First Street and Wood Avenue (U.S. Alternate Route 58), just off U.S. Route 23 in Wise County. The museum is 14 miles south of Norton and 35 miles northwest of Kingsport, Tenn.

Hours of Operation

Memorial Day – Labor Day

Monday – Thursday 10-4, Friday 9-4,
Saturday 10-5, Sunday 1-5.

After Labor Day – December 31 and March 1 – Memorial Day

- Closed Mondays; open all other days as posted above.
- Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas, January and February.
- **Schedule is subject to change. Please call ahead to confirm museum is open.**
- An admission fee is charged.

Other Places to See in Big Stone Gap

- June Tolliver Playhouse – Seasonal outdoor performance of the musical adaptation of John Fox Jr.'s "Trail of the Lonesome Pine."
- June Tolliver House and Craft Shop – Heroine of the "Trail of the Lonesome Pine" lived here while attending school. Shop features mountain crafts.
- John Fox Jr. Museum – Home of the famous author of "The Trail of the Lonesome Pine;" a Virginia Historical Landmark.
- Harry W. Meador Jr. Coal Museum – Traces the history of this important natural resource.

